

Representative Dawn Morrell

25th Legislative District

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Joint Committee on Veterans' & Military Affairs
Select Committee on Environmental Health
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Dear Neighbors,

A new state budget and many new state policies took effect recently. I'm writing to share some highlights and to announce the opening of my new Puyallup district office.

All in all, we had a very successful year in the Legislature. I'm especially pleased we greatly increased investments in education and children without raising taxes.

Sure, there were some disappointments. The Legislature did not pass the constitutional limit on state property-tax increases that I proposed; so we'll have to keep working on it. Overall, however, it was an outstanding year for our local values and the people of Washington.

I hope you'll find time to stop by my new district office at 103 West Meeker in Puyallup. Having a local office helps me to stay in close touch with

the people I serve. If you can't make it, then feel free to call or write anytime. I'd love to hear from you.

Finally, I'd just like to say a big "thank you!" for the honor and pleasure of serving as your representative. We've accomplished a lot for our area and our state in recent years. But we all know there is more to do, so let's keep in touch!

Warmly,



Dawn Morrell

2007 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Notice to senior citizens and their families

I'm pleased to announce I've recently been appointed to the State Council on Aging. This will help me to continue my work for health and long-term care reforms, senior property-tax relief, and other policies that benefit seniors and their families. Please send me your ideas for how our state can make life better for Washington's seniors and retirees.



Getting good health care to more people

Great health care news! New state reforms will soon give more families and small businesses access to affordable health coverage. The reforms build on the successful Small Businesses Health Insurance Partnership I authored last year, but go much further in pooling business, worker and government resources to make health coverage more available and affordable to small businesses and their employees.

Pooling resources means more buying power to leverage good prices, which lowers costs for everyone. Beginning next year, the new law will also help low-wage workers pay premium costs, which will reduce the number of uninsured Washingtonians. Importantly, the reforms will not involve a "one-size-fits-all" insurance plan that takes away choices. Businesses can still decide what they want to spend on employee coverage, and workers will still be able to choose a health plan that's tailored to them and their families. Workers will also have the right to keep their coverage if they lose or leave their job!

Lower costs. Consumer freedom. Respect for business needs. It's no wonder this innovative reform earned the support of Democrats and Republicans alike.

I'm also extremely happy that lawmakers expanded health coverage for 38,000 additional children in Washington. We're well on our way to achieving the goal of health coverage for every child in Washington by 2010!

Free prescription drug card saves big bucks

Can pooling resources really reduce health costs without lowering quality? Yes! The free Washington Prescription Drug Card is a great example. In 2006, Washington and Oregon became the first states to pool their purchasing power to give citizens cheaper prescription drugs. The result? According to the AARP, no state offers better discounts than the Washington-Oregon card.

More than 50,000 state residents already use the card, which can save up to 60 percent on generic drugs and 20 percent on brand-name drugs at hundreds of participating pharmacies. This free card is available to any Washingtonian regardless of age or income if they do not already have sufficient prescription drug coverage. You can enroll online at www.rx.wa.gov or by calling 1-800-913-4146.

Education scores big in 2007

Children and schools are far and way the biggest winners in the new state budget that took effect on July 1. We increased funding for public schools by over \$900 per student! This will mean much better support for learning assistance, class-size reduction, technology and transportation, special education, and teacher salaries. The changes will address many of the top concerns I've heard from parents and teachers:

- To promote excellence in math and science, we invested \$69 million in education reforms that will modernize state math curricula and requirements, expand after-school math programs, and help teachers learn the latest research on the best ways to teach math.
- After listening to the concerns of parents and teachers about the WASL (Washington Assessment of Student Learning), we delayed the math graduation requirements until 2013, to give the new math reforms time to work. Another new law requested by educators allows the SAT, ACT and Advanced Placement exams to serve as alternative assessments.
- Record state funding for school construction will help schools and ease construction costs that would otherwise be paid by local property-tax levies.
- Lawmakers launched an historic commitment to phase in voluntary all-day kindergarten statewide, beginning where it has the biggest impact—in schools with high poverty rates. The phase-in will reach about 20 percent of all kindergartners by 2009.



Sen. Jim Kastama and I promote local businesses as part of our work for the 25th District.

- The Legislature finally agreed to ask voters whether school levies should pass with a simple majority of votes. This was a top priority of the PTA and will be on the November ballot.

These are impressive gains for one year. But as an advocate for improving state support for education, I'll be the first to say there is more to do to help our local schools, and we will continue to work on it.

More good news for businesses and working families

As someone who realizes that small businesses are the engines of local economies and jobs, I'm delighted that we took other steps this year to improve the business climate:

- A six-month suspension of a portion of workers' compensation premiums will save employers and workers about \$315 million.
- A new law to adjust unemployment insurance costs will save small start-up businesses roughly \$10 million each year.
- Lawmakers invested \$5 million in new Innovation Partnership Zones where colleges and businesses will work together to create commercial products and high-paying jobs.
- The 2007 Public Works Trust Fund package I co-sponsored provides over \$71 million in low-cost infrastructure loans to local governments—and will generate over 4,200 jobs.

Higher education

I promised in my previous newsletter to work on putting college within the reach of more families by expanding enrollments, boosting scholarships and financial aid and holding down costs. We succeeded beyond my expectations!

The new state budget creates 9,700 new college opportunities and greatly expands scholarships and financial aid to help more families afford college. To hold down costs, we capped undergraduate tuition increases at 7 percent and made families of fallen service members eligible for tuition waivers. Best of all, we secured \$27 million to build the new Communication Arts/Allied Health Building at Pierce College Puyallup. This modern facility will help local students land good paying high-demand jobs in technology and health care.

This year's investments in higher education will benefit students, families and our economy for a long time to come.



My mobile home fairness bill is now law!

"All we want is a fair shake." I heard that over and over again from owners of mobile or manufactured homes who were denied basic rights. The Manufactured/Mobile Home Landlord-Tenant Act provided little help, because most people can't afford to hire lawyers for cases that can last many years. We needed a new way to ensure fairness.

Since Pierce County has more mobile home parks than any other Washington county, I took the lead and wrote a law to resolve disputes faster, with greater fairness, and lower costs. The new law—supported by Democrats and Republicans—enables the Attorney General to investigate alleged violations of the landlord-tenant act, broker voluntary agreements to resolve disputes and (if necessary) issue citations with fines as high as \$250 a day until violations are corrected.

This important victory for mobile home owners shows that with good will and a spirit of cooperation we can resolve even the toughest issues.

Regulatory relief for small business

I've said for years that businesses—especially small businesses—need regulatory relief. We made good progress this year by passing a small business regulatory relief package.

For the first time, a state agency that claims it cannot reduce the cost of a proposed rule on small business will be required to show *why* it cannot. The reform will also subject more state rules to rigorous review. Gary Smith, Executive Director for the Independent Business Association, called this law "a very important piece of legislation to address some of the costs of regulations." I call it a good start to needed reforms that will help small businesses thrive and create good jobs.

Homestead protection reform sails to victory

After listening to a local citizen's fears concerning medical debt, I worked to strengthen the law that protects family homes during legal actions for debt. Lawmakers heard us and took action by tripling the homestead exemption against creditors from \$40,000 to \$125,000.

This new law protects homes from a variety of creditors, but my main concern was medical debt—which causes nearly half of all bankruptcies. AARP reports that medical debt bankrupts another American family every 30 seconds! It's just not fair for people to lose their homes due to injury or illness. This change was overdue. The previous \$40,000 exemption provided less than half the protection of states like Idaho and Alaska, even though our home values are much higher. This reform is another proof that some of the best ideas for laws come from local citizens. If you have an idea for a law, please let me know!

Cardiac care reform

If you or a loved one has a heart problem, you want high-quality cardiac care as near to your home as possible. That sounds obvious, but as a critical care nurse and Vice Chair of the Health Care Committee I saw that outdated state regulations often restricted access to cardiac care and forced patients to travel great distances for needed treatment. That's why I led the effort to modernize state rules and greatly expand access to cardiac care throughout Pierce County and the state. This is a vital step toward a true statewide cardiac care system that puts the needs of patients first.

I'm grateful that every hospital in Pierce County and hundreds of heart specialists throughout Washington strongly supported my bill. That support led to nearly unanimous passage of my cardiac care reform, which was signed into law on May 11.



Your Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs is available to assist veterans and their families in accessing state and federal veterans benefits. If you know of someone in need of assistance, please contact, or have the veteran, service member, or family member call 1-800-562-2308.

